

Evangelical preaching is rational preaching

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED NOVEMBER 2, 1825,

AT THE

ORDINATION

OF THE

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SERMON.

ACTS, XXVI. 25.

BUT HE SAID, I AM NOT MAD, MOST NOBLE FESTUS; BUT SPEAK FORTH
THE WORDS OF TRUTH AND SOBERNESS.

This is part of Saint Paul's memorable defence before Agrippa and Festus. His whole speech, on this occasion, has ever been viewed a model of genuine eloquence. The good Apostle, though now in chains for his Master's sake, and addressing an audience of distinguished rank and splendor, loses nothing of the dignity, or the simplicity of his character. He speaks with his accustomed freedom and energy. He gives a brief, but lucid and interesting account of his former life; of his strictness as a Jew, and a Pharisee; of his enmity to the religion of Jesus, and his blind and bigoted persecution of its votaries. He relates his miraculous conversion, his commission to preach the gospel, his obedience to the heavenly mandate, and his determined steadfastness in exhibiting the crucified Jesus, as the great subject of ancient prophecy, as the Saviour of Jews and Gentiles, and the only hope of a lost world.

In the midst of his speech, he is interrupted by Festus, who exclaims aloud; "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad."—If we are surprised at this wanton and groundless charge of the Roman governor, we are still more delighted at the reply of the distinguished prisoner. "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." The mingled mildness, delicacy, dignity and decision of this reply were a complete and triumphant refutation of the charge of madness. And if they did not excite a blush in the noble accuser, they must have caused every hearer of intelligence and feeling to blush for him.

The assertion of the Apostle which we have assumed as our theme, might be easily verified by a recurrence to his whole preceding discourse. That he uttered the words of *truth*, is evident from the single consideration, that he stated facts purporting to be of public notoriety; facts which, of course, could not possibly be fabricated with the least hope of success. He speaks of his early life of Pharisaic strict-

ness, as “known to all the Jews.” He declares that he punished the saints in every synagogue, and by authority received from the chief priests. He describes his persecuting errand to Damascus, as sanctioned by the same high and public authority. The miracle which arrested him on his way, and which changed a persecutor into an Apostle, he asserts to have been witnessed by his fellow travellers. If Paul, then, uttered what was false, his detection would have been not only easy, but inevitable. A host of witnesses would have at once appeared to put him down. As to all that followed his conversion, his labors and sufferings for Christ, his preaching the gospel at Damascus, at Jerusalem, through all the region of Judea, and in a multitude of heathen cities and countries, the whole world were his vouchers.

The Apostle, then, speaks the words of truth—uncontested, incontestable truth. And this character of truth belongs not more to the facts which he states, than to the doctrines which he briefly exhibits; doctrines precisely the same with those which he more fully explains and illustrates in his epistles. For these doctrines, he explicitly and uniformly claims a divine authority and inspiration.

But is there no *enthusiasm* in the case? Is there nothing which denotes an overheated and disordered mind?—Let the candid judge. Let the genuine philosopher peruse and reperuse this remarkable speech. Is there not throughout, a calmness, a perspicuity, a consistency, a weight of matter, and a dignity of manner, the very reverse of enthusiasm, and unequivocally evincing a sound and well balanced mind?

It will readily be admitted, my hearers, that if Paul’s conversion was a delusion, so is the whole system of Christianity. If upon this distinguished Apostle, can be fastened the character, either of an impostor, or an enthusiast, it will be difficult for the subsequent preachers of the gospel to escape a similar disgrace. Nor will it be denied, on the other hand, that if the speech before us, and the epistolary writings of this Apostle—which compose no small part of the New-Testament—contain the words of truth and soberness, the same may be predicated of Christianity at large.

The sentiment, then, which I would take occasion from the text, to suggest and illustrate, is this; that the doctrines of the gospel, while they are incontestibly true, are likewise in perfect accordance with the dictates of sober reason.

Of the *truth* of the particular doctrines which compose the Christian system, we have precisely the same evidence, as

of the truth of the system itself. If the gospel is divinely inspired, and infallibly true, so are all the articles of belief which it contains. What is predictable of the whole, is equally predictable of all its parts. To receive the gospel as the gift of God, and stamped with his authority, and at the same time to deny, or even to doubt, the truth of any thing it explicitly asserts, is grossly inconsistent and absurd. The truth of gospel doctrines depends not at all on our being able to investigate them, or to explain them, or to comprehend them, but on the simple fact, that they make a part of the gospel system.

Hence it may seem needful, according to our plan, to offer some evidence that the gospel itself is true. But upon this subject, so ample and inexhaustible, only a few brief and imperfect hints will be attempted.

We have in our hands a book (I speak of the New Testament) which claims to come to us from God, and to speak by his authority. And is not this claim substantiated by every species and degree of evidence which the nature of the case requires or admits? Is not this book, in all its grand characteristics, obviously superior to all the noblest productions of human wisdom and genius? Are not the views it gives of human nature altogether peculiar and original, and yet undeniably true? Are not its descriptions of the character and perfections of God, incomparably sublime? Does not the method of human recovery and salvation which it reveals, at once honor the Deity, and meet all the wants and miseries of our degenerate race? Is not its code of morals absolutely pure and perfect? Does it admit a single false, or even doubtful principle? Does it spare a single vice, or fail to inculcate a single virtue? Does it not tend to form the purest, noblest characters? Does it not open the richest sources of happiness to individuals, to families, to communities, to the world? Are there not apparent, in the writers of the New Testament, a sincerity and candor, which, united with their good sense, and opportunities of information, forbid the suspicion that they could either be themselves deceived, or design to deceive others? Does not their mutual and perfect agreement in all essential points, evince a divine interposition? Are not many of the principal facts which they relate, attested both by Jewish and Pagan writers; by enemies, not less than by friends? Has not the sublime excellence of the morality which they inculcate, extorted a favorable testimony, even from the grossest infidels? Has not Heaven itself put upon their writings the sanction of *miracles*, numer-

ous, astonishing, and absolutely unparalleled? And do not the *prophecies* which they contain; prophecies which, from age to age, have been in a course of fulfilment, constitute a strong and continually accumulating evidence of their truth and divinity? In fine, did not the gospel, in its very infancy, make a rapid progress through the known world; and this, in opposition to the reasoning pride of philosophers, the power of magistrates, and the edicts of kings, as well as to the vices, the prejudices, the deep rooted superstitions and idolatries of the common people? And has it not, for now eighteen hundred years, been multiplying its triumphs over all the obstacles which human wisdom, and folly, and corruption, and self-righteousness, and art, and power have been able to oppose it?—Surely, my hearers, it will not be pretended that there is any religious system on earth, beside the gospel, which bears such signatures as these. Nor will any dream that a religion thus decisively authenticated, can possibly be an imposture. It follows, by unavoidable inference, that the gospel is divinely true. So, I repeat it, are all the doctrines which it contains.

But the object which I have principally in view, is to show that these doctrines perfectly accord with the dictates of sound reason. They are words not only of *truth*, but of *sobriety*.

Not that I would represent human reason as, properly speaking, the umpire in matters of religion. This is far from my intention. Many things in the Bible are matters of pure revelation. By the most powerful efforts of the human mind, they could never have been discovered; they could never have been even conjectured. To subject the truth of doctrines such as these, to the ordeal of reason, would be palpably absurd. They are utterly without its province. And as they elude its profoundest researches, and soar infinitely above its loftiest flights, they can never, surely, be arraigned and judged at its bar. Other things there are, making a part of the Christian system, which are more within the grasp of the human intellect. Of these, the truth and fitness are proper subjects of the cognizance of reason. While we contend that it is the stamp of divine authority which gives them the principal claim to our cordial reception, we contend, likewise, that they accord with the best dictates of the most enlightened and cultivated minds. Nor need we hesitate to affirm, even of those more sublime and mysterious doctrines to which we have alluded, that human reason, however inadequate to discover them, has noth-

ing at all to allege against them ; and more than this, that it can perceive ample and conclusive argument for their reception.

Discussions of this kind, it is humbly conceived, are never useless. But they are peculiarly demanded at a period when reason and revelation are artfully set at variance ; and when unwearied efforts are employed to persuade us, that doctrines undeniably found in the Scriptures, are at war with common sense. While some claim for a system which rejects all that is most essential and characteristic in the gospel, the imposing character of *rational* Christianity, let us, occasionally at least, meet them on their own ground, and with their own weapons. While we have the honor to share with the great and good Apostle in the charge of enthusiasm and madness, let us humbly plead his privilege, of showing that we are not mad, but speak the words of soberness, as well as of truth.

The subject is fruitful and inexhaustible. We are therefore absolutely compelled to select a few, from the very numerous topics which offer. And the selection shall consist of doctrines most obnoxious to the charge in view. If these can be defended, the question as to other doctrines will of course be put to rest.

We begin with the doctrine of **HUMAN DEPRAVITY**. This doctrine appears on the very face of the Bible. It pervades the whole volume. It is so intimately interwoven with the very vitals of the gospel scheme, that if you take it away, the whole system is marred, its beautiful features are distorted, and all its magnificent provisions appear a useless and empty parade. The doctrine implies that mankind, as a species, are alienated from God, as their sovereign Lord, and their chief good ; that they habitually violate his commands, and habitually seek their happiness in objects interdicted and unsatisfying, polluted and polluting. Is this doctrine contrary to fact, and to common sense ? Let it then be proved, that histories deemed the most authentic, are mere libels on an innocent and injured race. Let it be proved, that in our daily observations on passing events, our senses egregiously deceive us. Let it be proved, that legislators and magistrates have, for some thousands of years, been gravely employed in removing evils which did not exist. Let it be proved, that thousands of wicked men have, on their dying beds, grossly traduced their own characters ; and that thousands of the best and wisest of men have, in their daily confessions, uttered the language of fanaticism, or hypocrisy. Let it likewise be proved, that mankind at

large have ever been much disposed to love God with all their hearts, to serve him in spirit and in truth, to love their fellow creatures as themselves, to subdue their sensual appetites, to prefer a heavenly to an earthly treasure; and to spend this transient life in a constant and solicitous preparation for the world to come. When this object is accomplished, then, and not till then, will the doctrine of human depravity be effectually exploded.

Farther; an eminent Divine of our own country,* having shewn that all mankind, in every age, have uniformly plunged into that moral evil which is virtually their destruction, argues from this universal *fact*, a correspondent universal *propensity*; a propensity which he shews to be extremely evil and depraved. Every step of the process is encircled with light; and the whole falls little short of absolute demonstration. Will the philosophic deniers of human depravity give us some plausible reason to prove that an effect may uniformly appear, in millions and millions of instances, without the existence and uniform operation of a correspondent cause? This has never yet been done; and until it is done, the doctrine of man's entire and awful depravity must be viewed as possessing the decisive suffrage of reason and common sense, not less than that of the Bible itself. The same may be affirmed,

In the second place, of the great gospel-doctrine of **REGENERATION**. Says our divine Teacher to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." What is here styled a *being born again*, is styled elsewhere, a *being born of God*, a *passing from death to life*, a *resurrection*, a *new creation*. In these strong expressions, two ideas are obviously comprised. First, the change intended is not, as many imagine, common and superficial; but great, radical and vital. Secondly, it is effected, not by the unaided efforts of its subject, but by exterior and supernatural power; the power of God. And is it not obvious, even upon natural principles, that regeneration, in both these views of it, is absolutely necessary?

If man is naturally unholy; if he is corrupted to the very *heart*, he must be not only reformed, but renewed. His temper, his taste, his feelings, his whole character must be radically changed. Otherwise, the gates of heaven are for ever shut against him. And what if they were not? What if he could gain admittance to the mansions of celestial light? What sources of enjoyment could he find? For a holy God

*The first **PRESIDENT EDWARDS**. See his *Doctrine of Original Sin*.

he has no love. For the company of saints and angels he has no relish. For spiritual employments and delights he has no taste. If on earth, holy duties were disgusting, and disgusting *in proportion* to their holiness, how odious, how torturing to his guilty and groveling mind, would be the sinless purity of heaven.

If these things prove that none can enter and enjoy heaven without regeneration, other considerations equally prove the necessity of a *divine influence* to accomplish the great work. Were our nature but partially depraved; did there remain, amid the wreck and ruin of our apostacy, some latent sparks of holiness, as some have fondly dreamed, the necessity of a divine interposition, it is confessed, would be less apparent. But the reverse of what we have supposed, is the fact. Man is not partially, but entirely depraved. In his guilty breast remains no spark of love to God; no particle of real holiness. Exclude, then, from his case, a divine interposition; and you shut out every ray of hope. Leave him to himself, and you consign him to absolute despair. Depravity will not change itself to holiness. Hatred will not transmute itself to love. Sinners, will not convert themselves to saints. Just as well might you expect to see the wolf, or the lion assume the nature of the lamb, or the dove.

Let the appeal be made to facts. For how many thousands of years have the powers of moral suasion, of human reason and eloquence, been employed to subdue the vices, and banish the crimes of man. And with what effect? Human depravity has laughed at these puny and powerless weapons. Conscience, indeed, may often have been gained to the side of virtue and duty; but the *heart* has continued the slave of sin. The wisest of the heathen philosophers have felt and acknowledged this. They have confessed that the crimes of men, spurning all earthly restraints, assailed the very heavens. They have confessed that such was the strength of human depravity, that nothing but omnipotence could subdue it. They have confessed that no human being ever attained to virtue, but by a divine influence. Shall these truths which forced themselves on the minds of benighted pagans, be denied or questioned by Christians, under the full blaze of gospel day? If man is to be raised up from his ruins, how natural is it that his recovery should come from the Author of his being? Who is able to create him anew, but He who created him at first? Who but that God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness is able to shine into the dark chambers of the human heart,

and impart the life-giving knowledge of his glory to the soul sunk in the death of sin. Such a work demands a divine, a creative, an almighty power. Such a work is worthy of a God of infinite love and compassion. And surely it would be both unphilosophical and impious to deny that He who has the most perfect and intimate access to our minds, can change their inclinations, without infringing our liberty, either of thought or volition.

The doctrine of Regeneration, then, is not the creature of a deluded fancy. It is not a dream of enthusiasm, nor a relic of blind superstition. It is a doctrine most rational and consistent. It commands itself to the enlightened and reflecting mind, as the dictate of sober, undeniable truth.

Nearly allied to this doctrine, is that of the **DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY**. The Scriptures instruct us that the Most High bestows the special and saving influences of his Spirit, not surely without the best and wisest reasons, but for reasons which He deigns not to disclose to mortals. In this high and momentous concern, He acts on principles which elude all our researches, and baffle all our calculations. In short, *He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion.*

Here, human pride revolts; selfrighteousness finds its claims neglected; and hosts of objections spring up on every side. By numbers even of professed believers in the Bible, the doctrine is stigmatized as gloomy, rigid, absurd, incredible, and even impious.

To dissipate this throng of objections against a plain and fundamental doctrine of the gospel, we need but make a single demand. Let it only be conceded that all men are sinners; and it will follow, by the most direct and inevitable inference, that if any of the human race are saved, they must be saved precisely on the principle of that *sovereignty* which is deemed so objectionable.

If men are sinners, they have rebelled against their righteous Sovereign, and fallen under his awful frown. They have violated that holy law whose penalty is death; eternal death. They stand exposed, then, to hopeless, irremediable ruin. Not only are they exposed to this ruin, but they deserve it. If treated according to their merits, they perish everlasting.

If men are sinners, they do not even *desire* the salvation of the gospel. They may, it is true, shrink from the thought of exquisite and interminable sufferings. From such sufferings they may sincerely wish to be delivered. But from sin,

the grand source of all suffering, and the only real evil, they wish not to be delivered. With all its odiousness, with all its misery, they cleave to it still. Hence, as the salvation of the gospel is essentially a salvation from sin, this salvation is not an object of their desire.

If, then, as sinners, men neither *deserve*, nor even *desire* salvation, they must be utterly destitute of every species of claim to it. If they have no claim to it, it may be justly withheld. If it may be justly withheld, then, surely, if it be bestowed on any, it must be matter of pure sovereignty.

But why should it be bestowed on some, and not on others?

We reply: If the salvation of some rendered the condition of others more unhappy than it would otherwise have been, the distinction might seem either unjust or unkind. But this is not the fact. And surely the Sovereign of heaven and earth *may do what he will with his own*. When mortals have favors to impart, they claim to impart them to whom they please. And shall this right, so indisputable and undisputed as it regards men, be impiously denied to the God of heaven? And what if He be pleased to bestow his precious and undeserved salvation upon some of the least promising of the human family—say, if you please, some of the vilest and guiltiest? Shall this excite, in those who witness such displays of sovereignty, such astonishing forms of mercy, proud murmurings, or humble and grateful adorations?

The fact is, that this doctrine of divine sovereignty, which to many appears so gloomy and forbidding, is the prime glory of the Supreme Being, and the grand recommendation of his gospel. True, it frowns on human pride and selfrighteousness. But it imparts joy to the humbled sinner. It has given comfort to thousands of disconsolate souls. It has saved other thousands from the very borders of despair.—Let no sinner in this assembly; let no sinner in this guilty world, quarrel with the divine sovereignty. The time may come, when he will find it his last resort; his only anchor of hope. The time may come, when he will feel, with full and agonizing conviction, that, unless saved by signal and surprising mercy; mercy wholly unmerited, and a thousand times forfeited, he is undone for ever.

I pass to another topic of consideration; that of **ETERNAL ELECTION**. That this doctrine is declared in the Bible, and in terms the most direct and unequivocal, is denied, I believe, by few. And strange as it may seem, thousands who confess it, while they but half believe the doctrine for them-

selves, strenuously maintain that it ought not to be preached. Yet what can be plainer than that, if this is an undeniable doctrine of the word of God, not to preach it, is unfaithful ; and not to believe it, is incredulity bordering on impiety ?

It was once remarked to me by a gentleman of thought and reading, that the doctrine had much perplexed him ; that he thought it embarrassed with many difficulties ; but that finding it so frequently and explicitly stated in the Bible, he had formed the determination never to oppose it. Will any one deny that the resolution was at least natural and safe ?

But I am engaged to prove that this doctrine, so confessedly scriptural, accords likewise with sound reason. Here too, the argument will be extremely brief and simple. Nothing will be assumed, but the generally admitted fact, that man is not his own saviour ; that salvation, to whomever it comes, comes from God. If God, then, bestows salvation on every individual who is actually saved, he bestows it, not surely by accident, not without design, but according to the purpose, or determination of his own mind. One question only remains. Is this purpose formed in time, or in eternity ? And, my hearers, this question carries its own answer with it. If the Supreme Being has a thought, a purpose, an intention to-day, which he had not from eternity, he is a changeable Being ; He is not what he has declared himself ; *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*. But if God is absolutely and perfectly immutable, then whatever He does, or purposes to do, to-day, he purposed to do, from eternity. Of course, all whom he saves, he saves according to his eternal purpose.

But while we thus assert the doctrine of election, we utterly disclaim the crude and false and dangerous conceptions which are often connected with it. We deny that it represents the Most High as bestowing the bliss of heaven on a few favorites, to the exclusion of others, as good as themselves. Election does not destroy, nor impair the connexion between present holiness and immortal felicity. It respects not less the present characters, than the final states of men. While it designates them to the enjoyment of a holy heaven, it ensures their preparation for it.

We deny, too, that the decree of Election involves a decree of Reprobation, *alike sovereign and unconditional with itself*. God saves men, and he *determines* to save them, of his own mere, sovereign grace. God destroys men, and he *determines to destroy them, purely, solely and entirely for their sins*.

Finally, we deny that this doctrine discourages, in sinners, the diligent and earnest use of the means of salvation. Nor can we sufficiently lament that the decree of God should, in this case, be viewed as a reason for sloth, or for despondence, when in no other case, it is ordinarily thus at used. Is there an individual in this assembly, to-day, who doubts that God has determined whether he shall see the light of another sun; or who imagines that he can frustrate or change the divine decree? Yet is there an individual who thinks it indifferent whether, on leaving the sanctuary, he shall take a salutary meal, or a draught of poison?

Another great and distinguishing doctrine of the gospel now claims our attention; I mean the ATONEMENT OF CHRIST. To the pious of every age, this doctrine has ever been most precious. They have regarded it as constituting the very essence of the Christian scheme, and the foundation of all human hope. Yet, in this age of boasted illumination, some would blot it altogether from the Bible. As well might they attempt to blot the sun from the face of heaven.

Ample as the subject is, our remarks must be extremely brief. Objections have been made to the atonement of Christ, as a needless and superfluous expedient; and as a scheme involving injustice and absurdity. To each of these objections we will direct a few thoughts.

Why should an atonement for human guilt be thought needless or superfluous? True, there is no absolute necessity that apostate and sinful creatures be pardoned and saved. But if they are to be pardoned and saved, it is a matter of absolute necessity that the character of God be vindicated, that his law and government be maintained, and that effectual warnings be given to his rational creatures againsts transgression. These objects may be viewed as of little importance by thoughtless sinners on earth; but they cannot be so regarded by the God of the universe. Doubtless he viewed it as better that a single race of transgressors should perish everlasting, than that disorder and wretchedness should extend throughout his rational creation. The scheme of atonement by the Son of God provides effectually against both these tremendous evils. Nor, with our limited faculties, are we able to conceive of any other method in which such provision could be made.

It is true, that in accomplishing redemption, a holy Saviour suffered for sinful man. A Being of spotless innocence and infinite dignity was subjected to an unparalleled amount of distress. But to all this scene of suffering he voluntarily

and cheerfully devoted himself. And such was the nature of the case, that he could recover the life which he laid down, and receive a rich reward for the sacrifice, in the salvation of millions for whom he died. There was then no injustice in the divine infliction of suffering on the innocent Saviour. That suffering was endured for the noblest purposes ; and it was endured voluntarily on his part, as well as by the appointment of his heavenly Father, the righteous Sovereign of the world.

Nor were the substitution and vicarious sufferings of the Saviour in any view incongruous or unnatural. In the course of human life, which is no other than the course of providential dispensations to man, the innocent are continually suffering for the guilty ; and thousands of individuals are every day partaking the most important benefits, through the interposition of others. Vicarious interference is the grand medium through which the principal enjoyments, blessings and deliverances of the present life are received. Was it not natural to expect that, if recovery from the ruins of our apostacy awaited us, it would come in a similar method ? And was not the call for a vicarious, a divine interference, loud and affecting beyond parallel ? A world of rational beings, all immortal ; all sunk in sin, and doomed to endless ruin ; no eye to pity, but the eye of God ; no arm that could bring relief, but the arm of a divine, an almighty Mediator.

Judge, my hearers, from this imperfect view of some of those Christian doctrines which are, in part at least subject to our survey and comprehension—judge whether they are, or are not accordant with the dictates of sound and sober reason.

Other doctrines there are, which are purely matters of revelation. But for the Bible, they could never have been known, nor even suspected. Nor does the Bible itself undertake to strip them of all their mystery, nor to subject them to the comprehension of our minds. I might instance in the doctrine of the TRINITY. Here the Scripture plainly gives us the *fact* ; but the *mode* it leaves unexplained and incomprehensible. Precisely in the same way is the doctrine to be received by us. We are to believe the simple fact, while we confess and feel that the mode can be neither explained nor comprehended. Has reason any thing to object to this ? If the Bible be from God, are not its profoundest mysteries just as credible as its plainest narrations ? Did it contain no mysteries at all, could it establish its character as a revelation from God ? Would it not be wholly unlike all

his other works? If all the *works* of God are replete with mystery, must not his *nature* be much more incomprehensible? If, in his word, He has given us a glimpse of this nature, such as our feeble faculties can bear, shall we complain that He has not come out in such a blaze of glory, as to dazzle and overwhelm us? What nobler, what more indispensable exercise of reason, than to bow with implicit submission to the declarations of the eternal God?

But I pass to the addresses demanded by the occasion.

My dear Sir,

You have doubtless esteemed it a high honor, and a precious privilege, to go forth in your Saviour's name, and deliver the messages of his mercy to your dying fellow men. But this day, a new scene opens before you. This holy gospel is to be solemnly committed to your trust. And having been the favoured instrument of uniting, in an uncommon degree, the minds and affections of this people, you are now to be invested with the endearing office of their spiritual Teacher, and Father. Never, my Brother, till called before your final Judge, will you know an hour more solemn than this. Still, if conscious, as we trust you are, of a sincere devotion to your Redeemer, let not the scene oppress you.

Go forth in his name and strength, and be humbly confident of his gracious presence. Doubtless, it will be your object to preach to this beloved people, the pure and saving truths of the gospel. Nor will you shun to declare any part of the counsel of God, however offensive to the pride and corruption of man. You will, at the same time, endeavor by occasional appeals to their reason and common sense, to fasten conviction of the truth on their minds, and commend yourself, and the gospel you preach, to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

The duties of a minister are arduous; and his trials, such as none but a minister can know. But look to your Saviour. Think of him who came from heaven to seek and to save that which was lost; who spent his life, and poured his blood for a thankless world. Familiarize his spirit of heavenly love, of self-denial, of humility and meekness. What an honor, to follow such a Saviour, though in a thorny path. What a privilege to feed his sheep, to feed his lambs. What a happiness, to devote our souls, our lives, our labors, our all to his cause, and to stand approved to his eye.

May you, my dear Brother, be faithful, eminently faithful, to your heavenly Master; to these souls, redeemed by his blood; to the solemn vows you are now to take upon you.

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, may you receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away.

My dear Brethren of this Christian Church and Society,

We sincerely rejoice with you this day. Your harps, long hung upon the willows, you are now called to tune to the praise of the King of Zion. God has heard your prayers, and in compassion to your disconsolate state, sends his servant, to break to you the bread of life. We are peculiarly gratified with the union which has marked your proceedings connected with this occasion; and the more, if we may hope that the solicitudes and exertions of the Presbytery have in the least contributed to this happy state of things. Praise to Him who has all hearts in his hand; all events under his control.

And now, my Brethren, remember that on this day, everlasting consequences depend. Yes, many whom I now address will probably recollect these solemn transactions with joy or grief, to all eternity.

You have given this young man uncommon tokens of affection. And are you still willing that he should be faithful—faithful in declaring pungent, heart-harrowing truths—faithful in inculcating neglected duties—faithful in administering necessary and wholesome rebukes? Are you willing that, as he becomes more acquainted with your spiritual state, he shall address to you precisely the instructions, the reproofs, the warnings which your condition demands?

Guard, my Brethren, I entreat you, guard against the common, but fatal inconsistency, of loving the minister, and neglecting the message he brings; of commanding gospel sermons, and trampling on the truths, the invitations and the warnings they contain. Would you truly comfort the heart of your minister? Would you give him the best reward of his labors? O receive, with meekness and love, the word of life he preaches. Let the everlasting doors of your souls be opened, that the King of glory may come in.

The God of heaven is now coming near to you in the stated administration of his word and ordinances. Will you not gratefully meet him from sabbath to sabbath? Shall not his house be thronged with serious, humble, spiritual worshippers? Will you not come to the sanctuary from your knees? Will you not hear every sermon as though it were the last? Shall not all your houses be houses of prayer; and your families, so many nurseries for the Church of God? Shall not the sabbath be hallowed; and every profanation of that sacred day, religiously discountenanced? Shall not every

form of vice be solemnly frowned upon? Shall not the sins which vex and grieve that divine Spirit on whose influences the life of your souls depends, be searched out, and put away? In a word, will you not all *press into the kingdom of God*, and lay hold of its immortal blessings?

These, Brethren, are our solemn admonitions, and our devout wishes. Our heart's desire and prayer to God, for you and your children is, that you may be saved with an everlasting salvation.

Beloved hearers of this great assembly,

The subject which has invited your attention this day, is not a matter of mere speculation. It is a subject of vital interest; of everlasting moment. If the doctrines you have been accustomed to hear inculcated as the truths of God, are dreams and delusions, it is fit you should know it. If the preachers by whom these doctrines have been delivered, are impostors or enthusiasts, it is time you should be apprised of it. Examine, then, for yourselves. If any of you have never yet obtained a rational and satisfying conviction that the Bible is the word of God, lose not a moment. Settle the all-interesting point without delay. If you are satisfied of the truth and divinity of the Bible, examine its contents; scrutinize its doctrines, coolly, candidly, thoroughly, seriously, prayerfully. Should you find that the very doctrines which by many at the present day, are stigmatized as delusion and fanaticism, are the doctrines of the Scripture, dare to believe them on the simple credit of Inspiration; on the simple authority of God. Should you find that these same doctrines have the clear suffrage of reason and common sense in their favor, let this give you additional confidence. And O see that these heaven-inspired, holy, humbling doctrines be admitted to your inmost hearts. They may float, as speculations, in your heads; they may be coolly believed; they may be even warmly advocated, and still produce no salutary effect. Throw open, then, your whole souls to their benign, and purifying, and exalting influence. Let them imbue your spirits. Let them regulate your tempers, and govern your lives. They will thus bless and save you for ever. Thus, too, a resistless, a salutary conviction will be imparted to all around you, that the distinguishing truths of inspiration are *doctrines according to godliness*; that they preeminently and effectually tend to bring glory to God, and holiness and happiness to man.

If there be any present, whose views are the opposite of those now described and inculcated, and who are building their hopes for eternity on other and contrary principles, they

will suffer me to suggest, that there is at least a *possibility* that these doctrines, so contemned and reproached, may be true. No one has ever yet pretended to have absolute *demonstration* that they are false. And O my friends, permit me seriously to ask : What if it should be found at last, that the Bible was designed by its Author to speak a plain language to plain understandings ? What if it should be found that its natural and obvious meaning is its *real* meaning ? What if those doctrines which human corruption has ever opposed ; which the pride of learning and philosophy has despised, or overlooked ; and which licentious criticism has expunged, or explained away, should be found to be doctrines of unalterable, eternal truth ? What if the evil of sin should be found as great, the human heart as depraved, and regeneration as absolutely necessary, as the most serious of preachers have ever declared ? What if it should be found that the only sources of hope and salvation to guilty man, are the *sovereign mercy* of God, and the *atoning blood* of a *DIVINE SAVIOUR* ? And what if you should make these awful discoveries, but make them too late ? What if they should be first forced on your minds by the light of eternity ? O, what would be the agony of your disappointment ! What the anguish of your despair ? Would it not then be safe to retire, in season, from a refuge which may prove a refuge of lies ? Would it not be rational and wise to build your hope for eternity on the foundation laid by God in Zion ?

THE CHARGE,

BY JOHN H. CHURCH, D. D.
OF PELHAM.

Beloved Brother and fellow-laborer in the kingdom of God:

The office of a bishop, you have desired. The desire is now fulfilled in your solemn consecration to this good work, which angels might covet. But to them, is not committed the ministry, which you have now received. This honor have redeemed sinners. These, rather than angels, are made ministers of reconciliation in this revolted world; to beseech men, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God; to preach the word of his grace; to administer the seals of his covenant; to turn sinners to righteousness, and to edify the church, the body of Christ, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. How sacred is this office! How nigh to God are those now, who sustain it. And in the temple above, the faithful ministers of Christ appear in the midst of the circuit of the throne and round about the throne, to give glory, honor, and thanks, and lead the adorations of blood-bought millions; while the elect angels, at a greater distance, render their homage and praise. Well might Moses and Isaiah deem themselves unworthy of this honor. And well might the holiest man, that perhaps ever lived, exclaim, who is sufficient for these things! for unto me, the chief of sinners and less than the least of all saints is this grace given, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. And who can enter this office without fear and trembling, when the high and holy One declares, "I will be sanctified in all them that come nigh me, and before all the people, I will be glorified;" and confirms his declaration by the awful example of Nadab and Abihu.

Under the immense weight of these momentous considerations, we, my Brother, who have ordained you to this work, would now solemnly charge you, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to take heed to the ministry, which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfil it. We affectionately give you this charge, as your brethren and fellow-servants, who must soon stand with you before the judgment-

seat of Christ; each one to give account of himself and of his stewardship to God. We do it to stir up the gift that is in you; to promote your humility; to increase your faith; to enkindle your love; to fortify your mind against temptation; and to strengthen your resolution to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Take heed to thyself. We trust, my dear Brother, that you are divinely fitted for your work, by being a man of God, a man of faith and prayer. But you can neither maintain a good hope, nor be ready to every good word and work among your people, without continual growth in grace. This, however, will be strenuously opposed. The flesh lusteth against the spirit. This present evil world will oppose, and employ its influence against your rising to the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Nor will the powers of darkness fail to assault you, when marching forward in the grace and strength of Immanuel. Their fiery darts will annoy you; and their net be spread for your feet. By false colors, they may draw you into the snare. A neglected heart will turn you aside. Then strange fire may be offered. An assumed, and rather forced earnestness of manner will be used to supply the want of fervent love, and to maintain a name to live; and then applause and commendation will be more sought, than the honor of Christ or the salvation of your hearers. O how deceitful is the heart! Keep it, my Brother, with all diligence. Take, and dexterously use the whole armor of God. Indulge no thought of a coalition between Christ and belial. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." "Do I seek to please men?" said Paul; "for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." He indeed became all things to all men, in things indifferent: but he never sacrificed truth or duty to please men. He despised the honor of men, and sought the honor that comes from God only. The approbation of Christ he supremely valued. The love of Christ constrained him as his ruling principle. May the same love direct and influence you at all times.

Never think that your success depends on mere popular favor. You may be caressed with the lips, but despised at heart. But commend yourself to every man's conscience in the sight of God, by uniform fidelity and love to the souls of men, and you will be sincerely respected and beloved; nor will you labor in vain.

The first and hardest lesson to learn is humility. And this is rendered more difficult by the too current opinion that a minister must appear in his house, apparel and equipage, like the rich and fashionable of this world.* But Christ and his apostles judged very differently. They thought it no disgrace, but an honor, to be poor in earthly things. The opinion is alike hurtful, that greatness is to be preferred to goodness. Who is not prone to covet gifts rather than grace; or to be distinguished for talents, rather than to humble himself as a little child; or, as Mr. Scott remarks, 'to be most lowly and indifferent about consequence and preeminence, and most willing to be little, inferior, and neglected.' But this is the very spirit of the Redeemer's kingdom; and he is the greatest, who is most under its influence. Let this be eminently your spirit, dear Brother, and you will more and more resemble Barnabas; who "was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." You will then possess the best qualifications of a faithful minister. In the spirit of an apostle, you will preach the gospel to a people dearly beloved by you; and you will affectionately teach and warn them from house to house. You will pray for them without ceasing; and God will bear you record, how you long after them in the bowels of Jesus Christ. Aim, my beloved Brother, at this high mark of pastoral excellence, and never rest till you reach it.

Take heed to thy doctrine. See that this accords as strictly as possible with the sacred Scriptures. Let the radical principles of our holy religion be very familiar to your mind; and hold their proper place in every discourse, whether public or private. This will render your ministrations, by divine grace, more instructive, more convincing, and more productive of good. To neglect these principles is always injurious to vital godliness. Without them, your ministry will become insipid and useless. Said Dr. Owen: "Gospel truth is the only root, whereon Gospel holiness will grow. If any worm corrode, or any other corrupting accident beset it, the fruit will quickly fade and decay. It is impossible to maintain the power of godliness, when the doctrine from whence it springs, is unknown, corrupted or despised."

Never fail to give that view of Jehovah, which he has given of himself, as one God in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, equal in power and glory. Show no fondness of novelty on this subject; nor affect to be wis-

* See note at the close.

er than those, who have stated this great and essential doctrine, as it lies on the face of revelation, without attempting to explain it to human comprehension. Inspired writers have made no such attempt; but have exhibited three persons in the Godhead, by plainly ascribing personal properties to each, to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. What better mode could be adopted? How safely it may be followed! It has been followed by the great body of the faithful. It is now recognized in the most approved confessions of faith in the Church. Who can amend or improve it, by any new phraseology?

The scriptural character of God will next claim your attention. This is the prime source of correct theology and sound morals. Nothing will be rightly understood or done, where the knowledge of God is not found. What is eternal life, but to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent?

It is only by correct apprehensions of the infinite perfection and glory of God, that the immutable obligation and transcendent excellence of the Divine law can be seen. And when the law is not known in its spirituality and extent, human depravity and guilt will be denied, or viewed in a very partial light. Then will follow the denial or disbelief of the infinite atonement of the Son of God; of the nature and absolute necessity of regeneration by special grace, and of justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ. Thus you may trace damnable heresies to their source. Jehovah is not known as infinitely worthy in himself of all that love, which his law requires, on pain of eternal death for the least defect. The authority of the law on apostate man is annulled; and the whole scheme of his redemption is subverted.

The law and the gospel illustrate each other. They strongly reflect on each other a Divine glory. This must always appear in your preaching, if you would save those who hear you, or excite believers to be filled with the fruits of righteousness. No one will come to Christ, till he feels the law condemning him to endless misery, and prostrating all his former hopes of salvation. Nor will any one live a life of faith on the Son of God, and strenuously follow after perfect holiness, any further than the eternal and unchangeable obligation of the law is felt on his heart; and he delights in it, after the inner man.

By a detached and superficial exhibition of some evangelical sentiments, you might surround yourself with many,

who would hang on your lips and express to you warm affection. But you would sow the seed among thorns, or on stony ground. And it would yield no good fruit, because the ground had not been prepared according to the method of the divine Husbandman.

You will have to encounter an antinomian spirit in various forms. But it must be detected, exposed, and subdued, or you will spend your strength for nought. The righteousness of the law must be fulfilled in your hearers, or they cannot be saved. For without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.

Constantly preach Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes in his name. Address the impenitent, without exception, as already condemned. Urge immediate repentance and faith. Make every one see that it is of God that any are in Christ Jesus, and that he is made unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Let it never be your fault that any hearer does not feel his condemnation to be just, and his salvation to be all of grace through faith in Christ, and by the sanctification of the Spirit unto perfect obedience.

Let these few hints give you a lively impression of your vast responsibility as a preacher of righteousness. The eternal destiny of one soul is enough to fill you with the most trembling solicitude to be found faithful. But how many souls are now committed to your charge. These will be succeeded by others. See that you are pure from the blood of all that perish in their sins.

There are other topics, on which I might speak. But from what I have said, you can be at no loss as to what I should say on the requisite qualifications of candidates for ministry; the administration of sacraments; and ministerial fellowship. In all these things, keep thyself pure.

I know not how to close this charge, my dear Brother, without adverting to the opinion of the pious Chrysostom 'that few ministers are saved'; and to the observation of the eloquent Massillon, that 'God sometimes, in saving his elect, makes use of instruments, which he afterwards casts away.' What an awful truth! On what solemn ground you stand! How momentous the consequences of your ministry to yourself, as well as to others!

"No other post affords a place,
For equal honor or disgrace,"

What motive or encouragement can you want to serve God?

with your spirit in the gospel of his Son. *Lo, I am with you,* saith your Redeemer. How can you neglect your own soul, or the souls of your dear people, when the eternal world is opening to your view, and you see the Judge appearing ; the faithful few entering into his joy ; and the wicked and slothful going away into everlasting punishment.—*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. AMEN.*

NOTE. “Perhaps Satan never carried a more important point within the visible church than when the opinion was adopted, that *the clergy were gentlemen by profession* ; and when he led them to infer from it, that *they and their families ought to live in a genteel and fashionable style.*”

Scott's Notes on Pilgrim's Progress, character of Demas.

THE
RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP,
BY EDWARD L. PARKER,

Pastor of the Church and Society in the East-Parish of Londonderry.

The great head of the Church in accomplishing his purposes—particularly, in effecting the salvation of men, sees fit to make use of means. Among these the gospel ministry is the most important.

Dependant as we are, honored as we are, by being made workers together with Christ, and capable, as we are, of being useful to each other in this sacred office; it is of importance to the order and welfare of the Church, that on the induction of its Pastors there be an affectionate expression of that mutual fellowship which should ever exist among the ministers of the gospel. This sacred and prescribed rite of giving the right hand, which obtained in the apostolic age, has been transmitted to the present. And by this, we do now express our approbation of the reception and ministerial qualifications of our younger brother, and acknowledge him as an ambassador of Christ.

I, therefore, rev. and dear sir, in the name and as the organ of this ordaining Presbytery, present you the right hand of fellowship. Receive it, my brother, as no unmeaning ceremony. It implies and expresses much. By this solemn act we welcome you as a fellow-laborer into this part of our Lord's vineyard; we receive and publicly acknowledge you not only as a brother in Christ, but as a brother in the ministry of reconciliation, as duly invested with the authority, and equally with us entitled to the privileges of this sacred office.

And as the ministers of Christ stand in peculiar need of each other's kind offices, we do hereby assure you, while trembling under the weighty charge now imposed, of our readiness to aid and uphold you in the exemplary and faithful discharge of your many and arduous duties as the Pastor of this beloved Church and Society. And while such are our engagements, we receive this hand as your pledge of a cordial return of all suitable ministerial and christian fellowship.

My brother, your work is great. Difficulties and trials you will doubtless experience in the prosecution of the sacred business in which you are engaged as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ to sinful men—but let none of these things move you, neither count your life dear unto yourself so that you may finish your course with joy, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

May a visible success attend your ministry and animate you to increased fidelity and devotedness.

Long may you live and labor among this dear people now your special charge; and having turned many to righteousness, receive at last the reward of the good and faithful servant.

REV. WILLIAM K. TALBOT'S REPLY

TO THE

CALL OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AND SOCIETY.

To Messrs. Blodget, Towns, and Barley, committee for requesting liberty of inserting with the Sermon, Charge, and Fellowship, a copy of my answer to the call given me,—I reply, that notwithstanding the delicacy and reluctance I feel in assenting to the publication of the indigested effusions of the moment, yet that respect and affection I bear to the dear people of my charge, from whom I have so repeatedly since my connection with them received *such endearing testimony of continued friendship*, compels me to yield assent to any request of theirs, not unreasonable. T.

William K. Talbot to the Presbyterian Church and Society in Nottingham-West.

FATHERS AND BRETHREN,

A decision, upon a subject so vastly important to myself, so momentous to you as a Church and Society, so *consequential* to the rising generation, and the cause of our Divine Redeemer,—has long demanded my most serious consideration. Although to many it may appear my duty to accept without hesitation of your unanimous call,—nevertheless various circumstances have combined to render it in my own mind *extremely dubious.*

Although I would not doubt but this dear people who have presented me such tokens of their esteem, are capable of constancy of mind, and perpetuity of affection; nevertheless when I recollect how slender and brittle the thread of friendship,—how changeable the heart of man,—it need not surprise you that I fear lest a few years should witness the trying scene of a withdrawal of affection. And how, my dear Fathers and Brethren, can a man of sensibility endure to have his *well meant* efforts misinterpreted, his plans counteracted, by those from whom he anticipated assistance,—persecution from his Church and Society,—indifference or coldness from those whom he tenderly loves, and for whom he is so ready to sacrifice his health and every earthly endearment?

Altho' I cannot doubt of your determination of continuing me a salary (if I were to be at the expense of establishing myself among you,) honorable to yourselves, and sufficient for my necessity;—yet when I see the usefulness of so many of Zion's *Watchmen* impaired, their spirits dejected and broken down on account of pecuniary embarrassments, you need not wonder that I am reminded how deeply trying is the situation of him who on account of incompetency of support, is compelled to neglect the great and important work of the gospel ministry.

Nor should you censure me for this, as desiring more than is meet; “for I seek not yours but you.”

“ Is there ambition in my heart?
“ Search, gracious God, and see :
“ Or do I act a haughty part?
“ Lord I appeal to Thee.”

But when I reflect on my providential introduction into this place, the entire unanimity of this long disunited people,—the many tender and endearing testimonials I have received of your attachment and esteem—your almost unparalleled exertion to procure me a competency of support,—the respect and attention paid to my weekly administrations, I cannot,—I dare not negative your call;—for it is the call of Heaven.

I therefore, not only willingly but cheerfully accept of your invitation to become your Pastor. This I trust I do under a deep sense of my dependance on Jesus Christ the great head of the Church, for grace and strength to perform the solemn duties of the charge.—I do it in compliance with duty, from regard to your temporal and eternal welfare,—out of friendship to you and your families;—And I do not,

I cannot, desire to leave you so long as I am happy and useful among you. And while I accept of your call, I do it with the fullest confidence that you will be *ever* ready to alleviate my burden and remove every impediment in the way of my comfort and usefulness. As to my temporal support, the promptness you have evinced in subscribing, encourages me to hope for the same readiness when the subscription you have so generously advanced shall be collected ;—especially as you will recollect that a sum promptly paid will do so much more than when purchases are made on credit. It will be in your power, occasionally, to assist me by small favors, *as useful, and far more precious* than silver or gold : Because what is thus freely bestowed, has a superior value ; as it is an *endearing expression of continued affection* ; which

“ *Blesses both him that gives, and him that takes.*”

Whilst it encourages and animates the Pastor in his duties, it prepares the people to receive instruction from the lips of one whom their bounty and generosity has blessed.

I now give myself to your service in the Lord ;—take my lot among you,—desiring to live in your affections, and labor for your good ;—and when my labors on earth shall be finished, to die amidst your prayers ; finding you in eternity the joy and crown of my rejoicing.

Yours' affectionately in the Lord,

WILLIAM K. TALBOT.

Given at Nottingham-West, on the twenty-fourth day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty-five.

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